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FOREIGN OUTLOOK: ITEMS FROM MY NOTEBOOK

How is the United States filling in the gaping intelligence holes left by our ouster from Iran?

Even when the CIA effectively ran Iran under the shah, its intelligence was seriously flawed by being blind to growing opposition to the royal regime. Since the Ayatollah Khomeini took power seven years ago, U.S. intelligence agents within Iran were either executed, driven into exile or rendered mute from fear. Added to that, I'm told, is the appalling fact that few CIA analysts assigned to follow Iranian affairs in Washington can even understand the native language, Farsi.

Result: U.S. intelligence on this strategically important and politically volatile nation is now second-hand -- begged and borrowed from foreign embassies and intelligence agencies willing to share their information. Obviously, their interests may not coincide with ours, so the value of their data is questionable.